EL PODER DE LA PALABRA Y LA EXPERIENCIA TRANSNACIONAL: UNA ENTREVISTA CON GIANNINA BRASCHI

Carmen Haydée Rivera

Resumen

Esta entrevista a Giannina Braschi enfatiza su experiencia como escritora en y fuera de Puerto Rico, su sensibilidad artística, sus técnicas literarias, así como sus reflexiones sobre el acto de escribir, la libertad de expresión y cómo su bilingüismo/biculturalismo influyen en sus obras. La entrevista también incluye interesantes revelaciones sobre su contacto con otros escritores, filósofos y artistas, y cómo estos han nutrido su creatividad y existencia. Sobre todo, retrata a una artista honesta, astuta y realista, que continuamente revoluciona el mundo de las letras como lo conocemos hoy con sus comentarios incisivos, con su juego de palabras y lenguas, y con su visión de mundo transnacional.

Palabras clave: Puerto Rico, creatividad, bilingüismo, biculturalismo, transnacionalismo, mezcla de géneros literarios

Abstract

This interview with Giannina Braschi focuses on her experience as a writer in and out of Puerto Rico, her artistic sensibilities and literary techniques, as well as her overall reflections on the act of writing, freedom of expression, and how her bilingualism/biculturalism influence her writing. It also includes interesting revelations of her contact with other writers, philosophers, and artists, and the ways they have nurtured her creativity and existence. Above all, this is a portrait of an honest, crafty, and down-to-earth artist who is constantly revolutionizing the world of letters as we know it today with her insightful vision and commentary, with her play on words and languages, and with her transnational mindset and worldview.

Keywords: Puerto Rico, creativity, bilingualism, biculturalism, transnationalism, mixed literary genres

Op. Cit., núm. 20, 2011-2012
pp. 181-201, ISSN 1526-5323

EL PODER DE LA PALABRA Y LA EXPERIENCIA TRANSNACIONAL: UNA ENTREVISTA CON GIANNINA BRASCHI

Carmen Haydée Rivera

La escritora Giannina Braschi es una de las artistas puertorriqueñas más polifacéticas e innovadoras de las pasadas dos décadas. Sus propuestas literarias, escritas tanto en español como en inglés y traducidas en varios idiomas (sueco, francés, italiano y serbio), han revolucionado la literatura puertorriqueña en y fuera de la isla. Nacida en San Juan, Puerto Rico, el 5 de febrero de 1953, Braschi extiende su mundo creativo e intelectual más allá de fronteras geográficas, lingüísticas, históricas y culturales para abrazar una tercera dimensión de lo real y lo imaginario en su intento por situarse dentro de una tradición literaria que ella misma continuamente renueva y reinventa.

Su obra comienza con poesía en español, que refleja su erudición humanística e incluye un vasto conocimiento de la literatura, el arte, la filosofía y la historia universal como ejes centrales de sus imágenes poéticas. Su primera colección de poemas, El imperio de los sueños, se publica en Barcelona en el 1988 y agrupa tres publicaciones anteriores (Asalto al tiempo, La comedia profana y El imperio de los sueños). La Editorial de la Universidad de Puerto Rico reedita la obra en el 2000, con una introducción del filósofo y catedrático Francisco José Ramos.[1] En 1994 aparece la versión en inglés, *Empire*

[1] Giannina Braschi, *El imperio de los sueños*. Barcelona, Anthropos, 1988; Río Piedras, Editorial de la Universidad de Puerto Rico, 2000.

of Dreams, traducida por Tess O'Dwyer.[2] Luego, Braschi continúa con experimentación narrativa híbrida, desarrollada en una propuesta de yuxtaposición de géneros (narrativa, poesía, diálogo dramático) e idiomas (español e inglés) que desafía e imposibilita la categorización narratológica en *Yo-Yo Boing!*[3] Más recientemente, la obra de Braschi abraza la multiplicidad de voces y personajes que cruzan eras históricas y movimientos literarios e intentan desdoblar el sentido de la vida y la experiencia transnacional desde una perspectiva posmoderna. Esta es la propuesta principal de *United States of Banana*.[4] Para muestra adicional de lo abarcadora y reconocida que es la obra de Braschi, en el 2011 Amazon Crossing for World Literature acordó publicar y diseminar su obra en una especie de trilogía que incluye *Empire of Dreams*, *Yo-Yo Boing!* y *United States of Banana*.

Braschi ha impartido clases en la Universidad de Rutgers, la Universidad de la Ciudad de Nueva York y la Universidad de Colgate. Además, ha participado en seminarios de escritura creativa y traducción en Francia y Suecia, y ha sido Escritora Residente en el Centro Báltico para Escritores y Traductores en Suecia. Entre los numerosos premios y reconocimientos que ha recibido, se encuentran los de la Fundación Nacional de las Artes, la Fundación de las Artes de Nueva York, el Premio de Latina Destacada de *El Diario/La Prensa*, el Pen American Center, la Fundación Ford, la Beca Danforth, el Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña y la Fundación Peter S. Reed/InterAmericas. Braschi vive actualmente en la ciudad de Nueva York y trabaja en una colección de ensayos titulados Hamlet y Segismundo, que considera la muerte del imperio del siglo XXI.

Se trata, pues, de una artista que se aleja un poco de la historia tradicional del inmigrante en busca de su identidad a la vez que aspira a la realización del sueño americano. Su

[2] Giannina Braschi, *Empire of Dreams*. New Haven, Yale University Press, 1994.

[3] Giannina Braschi, *Yo-Yo Boing!* Pittsburgh, Latin American Literary Review Press, 1998.

[4] Giannina Braschi, *United States of Banana*. Seattle, Amazon Crossing, 2011.

escritura enfatiza la creación de personajes y posturas narrativas que continuamente cuestionan la imposición de ideologías que impiden la realización plena del individuo como ser pensante, capaz de tomar sus propias decisiones amparadas en unos derechos inalienables, dentro de un marco de lucha constante por recuperar la esencia de lo vivido.

Leer y escuchar la voz de Braschi nos obliga a repensar el significado de la creación literaria y el poder del escritor o la escritora para instigar el movimiento y flujo de ideas de una manera provocativa y diferente. No es lectura pasiva, es interactiva e inquietante. Seguir sus múltiples vaivenes entre voces, personajes, espacios, posturas ideológicas y filosóficas resulta una tarea fascinantemente agitada. Verla en persona y escucharla deponer sobre el proceso de creación literaria y lo que significa la escritura en su vida nos da el inusual privilegio de contemplar a una artista en su máxima expresión, aceptando la fragilidad y a la vez la fuerza de su existencia, los altibajos del acto mismo de escribir, pero, sobre todo, la convicción de sus ideas y la necesidad de expresar estas ideas de manera auténtica y libre.

La siguiente entrevista con Giannina Braschi se realizó como parte de un proyecto de investigación más amplio, que incluye a autores puertorriqueños contemporáneos, que escriben mayormente en inglés y residen fuera de Puerto Rico. También incluye las reacciones de la autora tras su visita a la isla para promocionar su publicación más reciente, *United States of Banana*. La entrevista es un fragmento de la conversación con Braschi y trata particularmente temas caracterizados por la influencia del transnacionalismo y por la innovación literaria, a la vez que refleja experiencias vividas en y fuera de Puerto Rico. La conversación se condujo entre dos idiomas que revelan la particularidad de la experiencia bilingüe y bicultural de Braschi, y demuestra su afán por mantener vivos los rasgos distintivos de su personalidad heterogénea. Pero el cruce de idiomas y el ir y venir de palabras y vocablos en español e inglés ocurren tanto en la entrevistada como en la entrevistadora, un juego de palabras por demás instintivo, casual y revelador, que muestra la contemporaneidad de procesos creativos y el interés por acercamientos teórico-literarios a los textos de los escritores y las escritoras más innovadoras de nuestra época.

Es sábado, 25 de marzo de 2011, y me acompaña la escritora Giannina Braschi, quien acaba de publicar su libro, *United States of Banana*. Comenzamos la entrevista a mitad de conversación desde que nos reunimos para almorzar en la librería La Tertulia en Río Piedras, Puerto Rico…

CHR: ¿Cuál es tu opinión sobre el concepto del transnacionalismo? ¿Te consideras una persona transnacional?

GB: En *Estados Unidos de Banana*, más que nunca soy transnacional y transgeneracional, rompiendo los bordes de los géneros literarios. *Camino a la Estatua de la Libertad con Hamlet*, un príncipe danés que habla inglés, y con Zarathustra, un alemán con raíces hindúes, para liberar a Segismundo, que representa al pueblo puertorriqueño atrapado debajo de la Estatua de la Libertad. Se casan Gertrude, la madre de Hamlet, y Basilio, el padre de Segismundo, un príncipe polaco que habla español, con el deseo de unir lo anglosajón y lo hispano –o las dos Américas. Si Segismundo siente pesar, Hamlet se inquieta –dijo mi maestro Rubén Darío. ¿Tú quieres algo más transnacional que esto?

CHR: ¿Qué piensas sobre el hecho de que actualmente vivan más puertorriqueños fuera de la isla que en ella?

GB: Ser puertorriqueño no se relaciona solamente con un espacio nacional sino con una estructura mental –la forma de reírse del puertorriqueño, la forma de amar, la forma de disfrutar la vida, la forma de relacionarse con otros seres humanos, la forma de pensar, la forma de comer. Y esta forma de ser puertorriqueño va más allá de las raíces nacionales. Y se relaciona con mi teoría sobre el perro realengo. Los puertorriqueños que viven en el extranjero no son plantas –con raíces enterradas en la tierra– sino perros realengos –que orinan y defecan en las raíces, pero las nutren –caminando y moviendo su cola realenga.

CHR: ¿Cómo afecta la migración a la idea de una identidad nacional?

GB: Yo no creo en la identidad, pero sí en el origen. Originalidad es volver al origen. Mi originalidad es puertorriqueña.

CHR: ¿Podrías vivir en un solo lugar por un término indefinido de tiempo? ¿Dónde sería?

GB: En un cuarto con ventanas al mar –y cerca de un aeropuerto– con mis alas listas para despegar. Me gusta volar. No soy de aquí ni soy de allá. No tengo edad ni porvenir. Y ser feliz es mi color de identidad.

CHR: ¿Te relacionas con otras personas de origen latino en tu entorno inmediato?

GB: Me relaciono con muchas personas de origen latino –no solo puertorriqueños o mexicanos, dominicanos, cubanos, colombianos, chilenos, argentinos, ecuatorianos, sino catalanes, italianos, franceses, portugueses, brasileños– y mezclas de razas nunca antes vistas ni oídas –como coreano-irlandés o ruso-negro. El principio de organización para ser mi amigo o amiga es amar la vida, no guardar rencor y aprender a reírse, moverse y ser flexible –y no pesado sino ligero y liviano.

CHR: La migración y lo transnacional forman parte de la temática de tus obras, ¿no? Comenta más sobre esto.

GB: Siempre han formado parte. He escrito sobre inmigrantes y extranjeros desde El *imperio de los sueños* con Berta Singerman, Uriberto Eisensweig, and Mariquita Samper. En *Yo-Yo Boing!* digo:

> Desde la torre de Babel, las lenguas han sido siempre una forma de divorciarnos del resto de la humanidad. Poetry must find ways of breaking distance. I'm not reducing my audience. On the contrary, I'm going to have a bigger audience with the common markets—in Europe—in America. And besides, all languages are dialects that are made to break new grounds. I feel like Dante, Petrarca, and Boccaccio, and I even feel like Garcilaso forging a new language. Saludo al nuevo siglo, el siglo del nuevo lenguaje de América, y le digo adiós a la retórica separatista y a los atavismos.

Saluda al sol, araña,
no seas rencorosa.
Un beso,
Giannina Braschi[5]

En *United States of Banana*, digo que hay dos movimientos en la historia de la emigración: invasión y emigración. Nuestra emigración ha sido una reacción a la historia de nuestra invasión. Porque nos han invadido –ya no somos los mismos y nos desplazamos. This is about changing perspective from the point of view of the colonizer to the point of view of the colonized. Yo estaba en Extremadura en una conferencia sobre las inmigraciones en España –y de repente se cruzó por mi cabeza este movimiento de invasión y de inmigración. Los colonizadores estaban preocupados por las inmigraciones pero no se fijaban en la causa: sus propias invasiones.

CHR: Me hablabas de tu experiencia de estudiante en la Universidad Complutense de Madrid y tu retorno a la Universidad del Estado de Nueva York (SUNY) para continuar estudios graduados.

GB: What a culture shock, moving from a European capital, where I was talking to the great poets and philosophers of the day in Spain, to Long Island where there was no culture, no social life, nothing of beauty. In a word, traumatic.

CHR: ¿A qué poetas te refieres?

GB: I met Claudio Rodríguez, Carlos Bousoño, Vicente Alexandre, and Blas de Otero. Claudio Rodríguez and I would hang out in taverns after class, smoking, drinking, talking poetry. I also met my great friend, Francisco José Ramos, who is a philosopher here at UPR. And, once I had an encounter with [Jorge Luis] Borges when a classmate of mine from Peru told me to go with him—to hear what Borges thought of his poetry. I thought, now that's really ballsy for a beginner, but I went along to meet the master. My classmate read a poem about

[5] Braschi, *Yo Yo Boing!*, p. 142.

chess, and Borges told him straight out, "You're imitating my style. You have to find your own way." The student said, "How did you do it?" Borges said, "There is no recipe. You have to find your own way." Then he said to me, "Let me hear what you have." I was shy and I only had one poem at the time so I recited it from memory. I don't remember the whole thing anymore, but part of it went something like:

> Soledades andantes reposadas en mi pecho
> Muñecas paradas en mis manos
> Cantando bellos himnos están danzando
> los muertos

Borges said, "You've got something original there. You have it." Later the wife of Blas de Otero, Sabrina, who was my teacher of Cervantes, brought me home to meet her husband. I recited another little poem that I've long since forgotten, but it ended with:

> Cuando enseguida tocaron a mi puerta:
> Era la ausencia.

Blas de Otero also encouraged me—telling me that all I had to do was keep writing. I gave some prose fragments that were precursors to the poems on letters in *Assault on Time* to Claudio Rodríguez, my teacher of contemporary Spanish poetry. I always wrote in prose. He told me, "you're bizarre, you have a very odd vision of the world. What you have to do is master the Spanish metrics of the Golden Age—Garcilaso's sonnets and the poems of Fray Luis de León, Quevedo, Góngora." I studied them deeply and wrote scholarly papers on Garcilaso, Machado, Cervantes. I love them all. But I always knew that I could never restrain myself to metrics and verse. I belong to a different continent and time.

CHR: Comment on your experience in Europe a little more.

GB: Well, I went to Sweden four years ago for a congress and then I was invited to a writer's residence. I went there for two years. Then, in Paris I was there for two months to

give poetry readings, one in Toulouse, one in Avignon, and one in Paris. I decided to move from the United States to start looking at the world because I felt that the powers are shifting and I had to look for the shift of the powers in order to grow as a poet. So that's what I did.

CHR: Did you grow up in a bilingual household?

GB: No, in my house everyone speaks Spanish. But I had an experience when I was a little girl, I was in Perpetuo Socorro [grade school]. In first grade they told me they were going to teach the subject matters in English, and I told my grandmother. I had to leave that school because I'm living in a country that speaks Spanish so I should not be studying subject matters in English. I don't find it real to my experience. So my grandmother took me from the Perpetuo Socorro School in Miramar to El Sagrado Corazón, where I took my subject matters in Spanish. I think I did the right thing. My brothers became businessmen, and I became "the writer" that has worked with languages. I don't think anybody in Puerto Rico, I have to say, has worked with the languages the way I have done. I did it in Spanish, I did it in Spanglish, and now I'm doing it in English.

CHR: What would you say is the best thing you've gotten out of academia?

GB: The universities in Europe gave me culture and honed my taste. The American schools gave me a practical sense of structure and deadlines. What I got is primary knowledge of what is really good. A taste, they educated my taste. Sometimes they were not good, but it doesn't matter because later as I walked the streets and I learned from the people in the streets, to have a sensitivity and to have music inside. The most important thing is to have music inside, tener la música por dentro. When you have music inside everything becomes soft and tender, and without softness and tenderness, nothing flows. So you have to really get into that softness and tenderness, so that things start flowing and going ahead.

CHR: Why did you leave teaching? Did you find academia stifling?

GB: I thought I was entering the academic world to teach poetry the way I had learned it in Spain. As a celebration of life. As a conversation across the ages. But the academic world here in the U.S. is so bureaucratic and hostile to poetry, and I was not interested in bankrupting my creativity. When I was coming up for tenure, the Dean called me to his office and said:

> The letters of recommendations all point to your potential to be an important critic. I urge you to keep poetry to yourself. Write at night before you go to bed. But dedicate your energy to criticism. Go to conferences. Join the MLA. Publish articles and lectures. Otherwise, you will be a poet without tenure. I am afraid if Shakespeare were coming up for tenure, he would be a poet without tenure.

My answer to the Dean was: "I don't want tenure. I want immortality. The immortality of a crab."

What I do is entirely what I am. Even my house, the furniture, the gadgets, my clothes, the strangers who become my friends—they all belong to a principle of organization. Taste, as Hannah Arendt said, is a principle of organization. Who in the world belongs together and how do we recognize each other. The way teenagers look at models in fashion magazines, I look at postcards of great poets. I dress the way Baudelaire dressed. I hole up like Emily Dickinson. I emulate the fiery gaze of Melville and the crooked jaw of Rimbaud. I am mad like Hamlet, Van Gogh, and Artaud. I don't distinguish between the poet and the character or the living and the dead.

CHR: And when you left academia you turned to full-time writing?

GB: Yes. I'm writing and living. Sometimes I miss the academic world a lot because I don't have the experience of what I call provoking the rage in my head. Because if you teach somebody or if you express your ideas, you're constantly taking them out. Sometimes I like that outlet

that provokes and is provoked by teaching students. I like that and I think I have to say, I miss that.

CHR: **Would you say that there is an outlet for that in the resi**dences or writers' workshops that you do both in the U.S. and overseas?

GB: Yes, because there I have people that I talk to at night. I talk at night to people so I can express my ideas, but sometimes in New York it's very alienating, my solitude. The people I talk to in the streets, I don't talk about my ideas, I just talk common things, so my ideas are stuck in my head sometimes.

CHR: When did you become a writer?

GB: I think I was an artist since I was born. I just had to figure out which kind of artist. I was a singer and a tennis player as a child. I remember the director of el Coro de Niños de San Juan, Evy Lucío, telling me, "There will come a day when you will have to decide between singing and tennis." But I didn't want to decide because I loved them both. In poetry I discovered that I could be an athlete of the heart and mix both—the way that I now mix poetry and prose. I remember writing something about a revolution when I was 15 years old, and ever since then I have been thinking of revolutionizing my being. I told my mother I was going to read it to Salvador Tió, who was my neighbor. My mother dug her red fingernails into my arms saying: "Don't you dare! He is going to think you're mad!" I dared, and he was one of the first ones who told me that I had it and encouraged me to continue.

CHR: What inspired you back then, being so young, to write?

GB: I had things in my head that I had to liberate myself from—my ideas needed liberation so I wrote about a revolution. I have been revolutionizing myself constantly and I'm always trying to get out of that comfort zone. It's always about leaving comfort behind and progressing your ideas and your thoughts ahead.

CHR: And you haven't stopped since! You have always been trying to get out of the comfort zone.

GB: I'm always trying to look for ways of getting out of that comfort zone. Como el sapo que cuando está en agua bien caliente se sale y cuando está en agua bien fría se sale, pero cuando está en agua tibia se hunde porque se siente tan bien que se ahoga en el agua. Yo creo que esa es la historia de Puerto Rico, del sapo que se ahoga en lukewarm water. Like the three options that were given to us in the fifties, with Estado Libre Asociado. I consider these options denied us our inalienable rights to the pursuit of life, liberty, and happiness. Instead of giving us those three rights, they substituted those rights with options. Give me the right, don't give me the option. And this is what I talk about in my books.

CHR: What about the act or experience of writing per se?

GB: When I'm a poet, I'm a Renaissance woman. My poetry is my center and then I write –Yo-Yo Boing! It is like a novel but you see the poet. Empire of Dreams, there's also narrative there. It's an epic, the epic of my life. When you read Empire of Dreams, Yo-Yo Boing!, and United States of Banana you see that there's only one work and that you should read the three of them to understand what I have been trying to do for such a long amount of time, which is the three languages: Spanish, Spanglish, and English.

CHR: Any experience with writer's block?

GB: *Yo-Yo Boing*! is about overcoming writer's block. When you compromise your blessedness—when you accept a situation that you know doesn't go with your primal being—when you let your economic situation become more important than your spiritual progress, you don't receive inspiration because you're stuck in the comfort zone. That's writer's block.

CHR: How do you get out of that writer's block?

GB: By moving along, moving along. I can't stay in one place. I'm a writer who has to be in constant movement.

CHR: So that going to other places, like Europe or el Caribe, ¿te estimula creativa y literariamente?

GB: Sí, me estimula. Every movement stimulates movement of ideas...

CHR: What kind of movement?

GB: Every kind of movement. Sometimes I walk the same streets over and over, year after year—looking for something new—when the new thing here is me—me in myself is new when I recognize my capacity for transformation. I love to talk to people in the streets. Anyone. I talk to porteros, taxistas. I talk to beggars. Sometimes tourists ask me for directions, and I go with them to their destination. I am a person of the streets, and I love crowds—the bunches of bananas and grapes—bunches of cherries and strawberries—and I love masses—and the elite. I love the highs and the lows. I reach high but I also get to the bottom of things.

CHR: On a personal level?

GB: Yes, I'm like a Jack-in-the-Box. You push me down but I always jump back up.

CHR: What are your thoughts about the debates over nomenclature, labels, identity: que si Hispanic, que si Latino, Boricua, etc.

GB: It's the economy of divisiveness. You divide people into tribes of quarters—so they count the quarters—and then they start thinking in dimes and nickels and pennies—that bring penuries—and forget they had one dollar each. It's one of the racist, capitalist techniques that Americans have used with us for a very, very long time. To divide and conquer. To keep us fighting with each other. And to leave us debating the options, but without rights. We're looking for something different than these divisions, divisions of genre, divisions of gender, divisions of age, divisions of race, divisions of class, and nomenclatures that get us nowhere. They are nonissues. They have no importance and transcendence in our lives.

CHR: What about your ties to Puerto Rico now that you're not living here?

GB: I sang "En Mi Viejo San Juan" to my grandfather so many times as a child that it became my destiny. My ties to the island are my mother and my sense of liberty. Cada país tiene su mito. Por ejemplo, Francia tiene el mito de la revolución. Puerto Rico tiene el mito de la libertad. Los puertorriqueños están continuamente preguntándose: ¿cómo me voy a liberar de mi jefe? ¿de mi trabajo? ¿de mi madre? ¿de mi esposa? ¿de estas deudas? ¿de los chismes? Encontrar esas liberaciones puertorriqueñas. Esa es mi razón de existencia. Si nos liberáramos como nación estas liberaciones personales ya no tendrían la misma importancia que les damos diariamente. What is damaging us is entertainment, representation, plots, narration, description. I don't need you to describe a banana. I will eat it myself. I eat the banana and I experience it better than you describing it. So create a world that I have not seen and then I will be happy.

CHR: **What about comparing the island to what you left behind** when you come back now and visit? How it was different.

GR: I see a physical deterioration, I feel there is a physical deterioration, pero también lo veo en Nueva York. Hay un deterioro también en Nueva York, se nota en las calles, se nota aquí también en las calles. Me imagino que también hay un deterioro emocional y psicológico y espiritual. El problema que está pasando en las colonias americanas y en Estados Unidos es que nos estamos dando cuenta que el progreso material no necesariamente conduce a un progreso espiritual. Y sin progreso espiritual no hay progreso material. Entonces el problema está en este bankruptcy of ideas that is happening in the United States now and that is happening in Puerto Rico also. We have no new ideas because we are not progressing spiritually, so we have to move in the spiritual way to progress in the material.

CHR: Háblame de Amazon Crossing, your new publisher.

GB: Barney Rosset, who founded Grove Press and Evergreen Review, told me he would publish United States of Ba-

nana, and I was thrilled because I adore him and he adores me. He published William Burroughs, he published Jean Genet, he published Samuel Beckett. He also published Duras, Sontag, Acker, Ginsberg, Oe, Neruda, Rulfo. Barney is a revolutionary who understands that taste is an organizing principle of who in the world belongs together—and how do we recognize each other. He says, I love the book and I want to publish it, but I need distribution. Later that week I got a call from the publisher of Yo-Yo Boing!—saying that Amazon Crossing was looking for me. It turns out that they wanted to rerelease *Empire of Dreams* and *Yo-Yo Boing!* in Spanish and in English translations—and they wanted to see my latest work, which I had just finished two weeks earlier. They were offering worldwide distribution for paperback and Kindle editions. Barney said, "Well, that's just the kind of distribution you need. Let them publish you, but know that they won't love you the way I do."

CHR: What about audience reception? Who do you write for?

GB: For all and for none. Like Nietzsche said. I don't target a particular audience. I want to write for the spiritual progress of the world. I want to write for the spiritual progress of the world and for the powers that are in the world, and saying "these powers are shifting, let's look at them and bring them to us." To be with them I cannot be targeting any particular market because that's against my philosophical, my human, and my emotional development and the development of the world. I cannot think that way, I'm a visionary. I see things, I'm a medium of thoughts. I cannot think that way, it's in detriment of my being.

CHR: How do you address the issue of language selection and utilization in your works?

GB: In the 1980s I wrote Imperio de los sueños, traveling through the history of the Spanish language from medieval Spanish to Renaissance Spanish to modern Spanish. You can feel the language shifting within each book of poems. *Imperio de los sueños* is a collection of six books. Part one is *Assault on Time*. Part two is *Profane Comedy*,

which has *Book of Clowns and Buffoons*, *Poems of the World*, *Pastoral or the Inquisition of Memories*, and *Song of Nothingness*. Part three shifts into an antinovel with *Intimate Diary of Solitude*, which ends that series in Spanish. After which, I wrote a bilingual dramatic novel.

CHR: Was this *Yo-Yo Boing!*?

GB: Yes. And now the new book, United States of Banana, was written entirely in English, but in a foreign-speaking English. All along, what I've been doing is writing the process of the Puerto Rican mind—taking it out of context—as a native and a foreigner—expressing it through Spanish, Spanglish, and English—Independencia, Estado Libre Asociado, and Estadidad—from the position of a nation, a colony, and a state—Wishy, Wishy-Washy, and Washy. Todos los partidos están partidos y son unos partidos. These options have denied us our inalienable rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Instead of giving us those three constitutional rights, they substituted those rights with options. It's like when you go to a restaurant, they give you a menu and say, "What do you want: mashed potatoes, French fries, or baked potato?" Any way you serve it, it's all the same potato. A veces yo escribo en inglés y estoy pensando en español. Which is fine, because somebody has to start doing these things, but sometimes Americans don't understand this language, this shift. I had an editor once that he wanted to take all of my philosophical ideas out, because he was so practical, he's so accustomed to actions that he thought he could eliminate all my ideas. And I said, "No way!" I'm an editor myself. I'm a really great editor. And I know the shifts, I know how to do it. So when I turn a book in, it's because I thought it upside down. If you can help me with something good then I will accept it. If it's for the better I will accept it but sometimes it's not.

CHR: What inspired you to go from the poetic to the narrative?

GB: And from the narrative to theater. Theater is a work of age. It comes with experience and I'm ready now for theater.

CHR: So even in genres you are always in movement?

GB: Oh yes. When I was thirteen years old, I had won the women's tennis championship in Puerto Rico. Then one day I went to the tennis court at El Caribe Hilton, and I looked at the sun in my face and I said, "This is not for me." I walked off the court and said, "No more tennis." It was very hard because I knew I had a career there. But then I discovered modeling, which I loved because I love transformation of the self. By the time I was fifteen, I was named one of the ten best dressed women in Puerto Rico.

CHR: You were fascinated by fashion?

GB: I was fascinated by fashion and I was fascinated by makeup and I was fascinated by singing and I was fascinated by playing tennis. The idea and the activity of playing fascinated me. I was trying to liberate my mind through the body. I was a bit of a social butterfly. I knew what fame was early in life. Then one day, I woke up and felt the same thing I felt when I walked off the tennis court. I said, I have something inside that I have to express in a different way. I have to find a way of canalizing this. I began to read books and books and more books. And then I discovered I'm a poet. Through poetry, through literature, I can express all my contradictions and all my transformations and I can go from one genre to the other and to the other and I can solve the issues of this personality that is in constant transformation and revolution.

CHR: That is an interesting transition. Out of all your transformations, I can't seem to see the social butterfly, si no es porque me lo dices. Te veo como revolucionaria, te veo como innovadora, te veo haciendo algo que se tiene que hacer en la literatura. So this sounds like a maturation process, when you come into your own as a writer.

GB: I'm fascinated by the idea that you can be frivolous without being superficial. Ovid has poems advising women how to apply their makeup and how to make themselves more beautiful. In reality he is talking about his own poetry. My character Mariquita Samper,

the heroine of *Intimate Diary of Solitude*, works at Macy's as a makeup artist by day and dreams of revolution at night. She ends up shooting the narrator of the Latin American Boom novels who keeps rewriting her diary in the hopes of capitalizing on the intimacy of her solitude. This reminds me of when I was in high school and I had invited René Marqués to el Colegio de las Madres to give a lecture on his works. He immediately said yes because he was my mother's boyfriend once upon a time in Arecibo. I was mesmerized by his intensity, his clouds of smoke, and his curses. When Marisol Malaret was crowned the first Miss Universe from Puerto Rico, my mother and I arranged an interview between frivolity and intellectualism. We paired the most beautiful with the most brilliant. The interview between Marisol Malaret and René Marqués appeared in a magazine—and I was shocked to see how harsh René thought he had to be to Marisol in order to be taken seriously as an intellectual. But, come to think of it now, I also had the same complex. For a long time, I never told anyone about my childhood experiences as a tennis champion or a fashion model. I only identified myself in the present tense as a poet.

CHR: How would you like to be remembered in terms of your work?

GB: I want people to feel transformed after they have read me. I want them to memorize me because that is how I write. To be memorized. To be learned by ear. To be learned by heart.

CHR: That the work stays with you after the final page?

GB: That it stays with you, right. That you say, "Wow, this book was really different and now I am different."

CHR: Do you think your writing is for younger or mature readers?

GB: Experience of this kind is ageless. But when the younger readers first get a taste of it, they say, "What a weird thing, what a strange, strange thing."

CHR: That's exactly what my students say when they read your work!

GB: That's what happened to me when I first read the revolutionary writers that I really love. I said, "What a weird thing, I cannot capture it now, but I will come back to it later." Prior you asked me what did I get from academia? Exactly this, the possibility of being introduced to writers that I would have never experienced any other way. Like James Joyce whom I didn't understand when I was a student. And then I came back to him later and understood what I didn't understand before.

CHR: A first reading of your work is difficult because you have so many allusions to literature, history, politics.

GB: They say that and I like that.

CHR: But coming back and rereading, then you get the nuances and the multiple references and the multiple meanings. That is why I think you and your work are so important, because you have a different feel for language. Y estás haciendo cosas que otros escritores no están haciendo.

GB: Gracias, Carmen.

CHR: Para mí en otro nivel.

GB: ¡En otro planeta también!

CHR: It is part of coming from this very heterogeneous background. Y también, to a certain extent, being very brave with your writing. No dejar que te limiten ni editorialmente, ni temáticamente, ni lingüísticamente. Some people can't deal with that because they want the categories, they want the Latina writer, the woman writer, the stereotypes. Has anyone categorized you in these terms?

GB: Yes they have, but I think they're all wrong. The ones who do that, they are all wrong. Not that I'm not Latina, I'm Latina. I'm a feminist also if you want to say so. I'm a poet, I'm a philosopher, I'm a thinker and they're all wrong putting me in a little box. Because those boxes don't count. At the end of the world, at the end of life,

when you read Socrates, when you read Plato, when you read Plato and Socrates as a character, when you read Nietzsche, when you read Don Quixote, none of those categories are there. The categories that count are categories of humanities and of nourishment, spiritual nourishment and development of ideas and of literary genres, and of life.

CHR: So readers, critics, audiences are getting something else when they pick up your works, which is aesthetically and literarily richer. En ese sentido, you are moving in a different direction and I want people to acknowledge that shift. What I have gotten from the interviews conducted so far is that sense of shift. We are moving into different discussions and issues more relevant to contemporary society and the way we see life in and out of Puerto Rico. Since we last spoke, you came to Puerto Rico to give a reading and book presentation at the University of Puerto Rico and Biblioteca Nacional. Talk about what that experience meant to you.

GB: I was so happy to be debuting my new book *United States of Banana* in the Sala Federico de Onís and to feel the presence of Concha Menéndez whom I met and admired when I was a young student. There were three great women of that era—Concha Menéndez dedicated to Latin America, Margot Arce dedicated to Spain, and Nilita Vientós Gastón dedicated to Puerto Rico and to whom I dedicate *United States of Banana*. And to see at the entrance the acknowledgement from the city of Moguer to the people of Puerto Rico for welcoming Juan Ramón Jiménez—that warmed my heart. What filled me with hope for Puerto Rico was the unquenchable thirst for learning and imagination that I felt in the students—the same unquenchable thirst that I had when I was their age—and that I still have today.

Manuscrito recibido: 2 de febrero de 2012
Manuscrito aceptado: 19 de febrero de 2012